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ABSTRACT

This paper gives an overview of the program for the Fifth International Reading Association World Congress on Reading and reviews some of the works and research of educational authorities and how these affect reading. The contents include: "Symposium A," which addresses cognitive functions required for reading, comprehension, and how ability and progress can be evaluated; "Symposium B," which deals with literature and the reader; "Symposium C," which is concerned with programs for early intervention, the roles of instructional personnel, and developments in teacher education; "Symposia D and E," which deal with sequence of learning and materials, oral reading diagnosis, teacher strategies for the improvement of reading comprehension, and individual instruction; "Working Parties A, B, and C," which are closed seminars related to language problems and literacy problems; and "Straws in the Wind," which discusses reading in other countries, reading research on comprehension, problem solving, expectations for the reader, concept development, children's writing, and the competent reader. (WR)

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READING'S NEW HORIZONS

For the First Plenary Session of the Fifth IRA World Congress on Reading, Monday, August 12, 1974, 2:30 P.M., Vienna, Austria

The Fifth I.R.A. World Congress here in Vienna is the third to be held in Europe in ten years: Paris, Copenhagen, Sydney, Buenos Aires, and now Vienna. It is a way of keeping up with world developments in the cause of literacy, and through an exchange of ideas a way of becoming a part of a more powerful and enlightened movement.

Professor Merritt and his committee are to be congratulated on the structure and scope of this program. He has such faith in the simplicity of the design that he has asked me to spend a little time explaining it. You know how it is: if you wonder whether the whole class can read the assignment on the chalkboard, you take the poorest reader aside to read it aloud to you.

A structural overview of the program leads me to remind you that, contrary to most beliefs about the creation of the world, the camel was put together by a committee. But this creative committee has set a new record. This program is a little more like a starfish which has collected a number of symbiotic riders. These riders and the appendages of the starfish provide for individual preferences.

Symposium A

Functional literacy is the subject of the first of five symposia. Four of the five include the reader in their titles,

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for what the reader has to do when we ask him to read is a very complex matter,still a mystery to us in many respects. The more we can learn about it, the closer we shall come to an ideal in reading instruction. We can ignore it, but it won't go away, and neither will our failures.

Even though a person may know how to read,he may be a functional illiterate, one who cannot read what he must in order to function in his work,his shopping, his travel, his duties of citizenship. Many young adults cannot read the forms and fill the blanks that get them jobs and promotions, or read the fine print on cans of food to see what they are buying.

For example, the Harris survey[1], the Survival Literacy Study of 1970, interviewed and tested more than 5,000 adults in the United States. Thirty-four per cent of them could not fill out a request for medical aid, and 8% could not complete a driver's license application.

Symposium A is for the person who wonders when a child is ready for certain intellectual tasks,what cognitive functions reading requires,how the reader goes about comprehending the author's meaning,what kinds of material he must read for survival in his society, and how his ability and progress can be evaluated. Two workshops on evaluation at two educational levels follow the lectures.

Symposium B

Symposium B. deals with Literature and the Reader.

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It is for those who wish to know whether the reading of literature develops reading skills and attitudes, or people merely maintain and refine skills as they read; whether the reading of literature makes a better person of the reader, how the school can promote the reading habit, how cultural problems affect the success of the school; the range of children's books which should be in libraries in the home, the school, and the community; how children's writing aids children's reading, how progress in recreational reading can be evaluated. Two workshops deal with evaluation techniques at two educational levels.

Some of you may remember that about fifteen years ago UNESCO sponsored the formation of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, which, with additional support during the following years undertook a world-wide study of student achievement in a number of subjects. In 1973 Alan Purves reported the results of the literature study.[2] The results of the survey test in a sampling of industrialized and developing societies showed that the teacher determines to a great extent the student's critical approach to literature. In Italy, for example, students deal with literature historically; in the United States, from the standpoint of symbolism or morality. Would it be better to broaden the offerings so that students could develop versatility in viewing literature no matter which side of the globe they inhabit?

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Symposium C

Symposium C, The Reading Field, is concerned with programs for early intervention, the roles of instructional personnel, and developments in teacher education. It is for the person who wants to know the effectiveness of programs designed to compensate for lack of stimulation in early childhood; the role of the teacher and of the paraprofessional; the difference between these roles in industrial societies and developing societies, how to evaluate the child's progress, and how to make sure that teacher competence is being developed in teacher education.

It is increasingly clear that early intellectual stimulation is a key to high achievement. Reading specialists find the early childhood target particularly interesting because language development and cognitive skills are crucial to success in reading.

The proper use of the paraprofessional in the classroom can mean more opportunity for individualization and more adult stimulation for the child.

Teacher education is undergoing many changes. New programs stress motivation of the prospective teacher through flexible programming, independent study, the use of multi-media, and modules of content to be learned.[3] Role playing and real teaching experiences are prominent in the development of competency.

Symposia D and E

Both Symposia D and E share the title, The Teacher and the Reader. D is for the second six years of schooling,

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E for the first six. That the first six should be placed second is a reminder that a starfish can easily reverse itself. Part I of each symposium deals with the sequence of learnings and materials (which is not to be reversed, I trust), and ways in which individual development may be accommodated. Part II introduces a new type of oral reading diagnosis which differentiates between so-called errors reflective of the reader's mother tongue or grasp of syntax, and true distortion of the author's meaning[4]. This new approach deserves study in every written language by every classroom teacher or clinician and by every teacher educator.

Also in Part II are teacher strategies for the improvement of reading comprehension, followed by workshops on individual instruction. Recent research has shown that the effect of the teacher's questions on the reader's comprehension is not entirely beneficial. In self-administered reading comprehension programs, on the other hand, the reader marks himself right or wrong and is not helped unless by a teacher or paraprofessional to see what he overlooked or misread. He will make the same mistake again unless the cognitive, affective, linguistic or experiential reason is rectified. This kind of assistance and insight into reasons for deviant answers could well be the long-standing secret of the successful teacher.

Perspectives A Through J

The riders that cling to the back of the starfish are appropriately at the back of the program. While the starfish does all the work, the riders enjoy the perspective.

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Perspectives A Through J are sessions devoted to persistent perennial problems to which the speakers will bring new perspectives, things you always wanted to know and never dared ask about.

Working Parties A,B, and C

Working Parties A,B, and C are closed seminars limited to 15 previously invited members each, to advance our thinking on standards, language problems, and literacy problems. The rooms are not equipped electronically for leaks.

The Congress closes with a Second Plenary Session, in which Professor Nila Banton Smith, a distinguished teacher of reading herself, will present the classroom teacher's role in helping the disabled reader.

Straws in the Wind

And now I should like to give a bit of perspective of my own.

The history of reading instruction can be seen all around the world. In some places it is still thought that all one needs to do to teach reading is to teach the symbols which represent the sounds or the ideas of the language. It is a very dangerous practice to stop with that level of literacy. The reader can then become a parrot who broadcasts ideas he does not really think through. He can become unwittingly a tool in the hands of an enemy. It does not behoove any nation to stop with that kind of literacy or even to introduce it,if that is where it will stop.

In some countries in the world,reading is used rather than taught, once the symbols are learned. The sub-skills

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which would support the further development of comprehension are assumed,not taught. The textbook is read aloud and the grasp of ideas is assumed. Questions on the author's meaning are not asked. Differences of opinion are not invited, and the teacher never knows what may be puzzling the student or how he might be helped.

Even in countries where textbooks are designed to stress comprehension, children's perceptions of reading are not entirely satisfactory. Studies in Scotland,New Zealand,[5] and North America have shown that young children taught to read for a year still may not be able to identify a word, a letter, as long as the beginning of a sentence, the letter which stands for the first sound in the word, and so on. They think that reading is saying what the print represents.

This kind of evidence reveals that not only have we failed to match instruction with the reading task, but we ourselves have had and have transmitted a distorted and limited idea of the reading process.

In a massive and expensive national effort in the United States to improve the reading ability of the poorer readers, great stress was laid on sound-symbol correspondences and word recognition. The gain was disappointing.

In a large group of beginning reading studies employing different methods of instruction, the finding was that method made less difference than the quality of teacher. Something the successful teachers were doing was not a part of teacher education.

The study by Robert Thorndike, Reading Comprehension

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Education in Fifteen Countries,[6] showed that the cultural opportunities of the home were the best predictors of reading comprehension scores, and that the reading comprehension scores were generally good predictors of students' scores on tests of science and literature. In developing countries the mean scores were so low that errors on fact questions were no less numerous than errors on questions requiring inference. The younger Hindi-speaking children in India read relatively better than the children of other developing countries, and better than would have been expected from the scores of the students tested at higher educational levels. I could not help remembering when I saw this that a special effort was made eleven years ago[7] in Indian teacher education and in the publishing of textbooks to stress cognition and reading comprehension. Perhaps the new program for standards one through five in Hindi reading was reflected here.

It took Piaget to stun the world with the central importance of cognition. It took Carol Chomsky and others[8] to break the myth that children have a mastery of the grammar of their language on entrance to school. Now many research scholars are working on these two areas of strength for the development of reading comprehension.

While neurologists implant devices in the brain to discover clues to its operation, computer scientists build computer systems for problem solving. Professor Simon of the Carnegie-Mellon Institute in Pittsburgh, a leading

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computer scientist, is trying to find out how problem-solving by the human brain differs from that of man-made computers.[9] He gives a student a prose passage on a social problem and then tapes what the student says he is thinking as he tries to solve it. While Simon's research is rewarding, he knows that even the student may be unconscious of some of the thinking he does, and the brain itself refuses to be interviewed. When asked why he confines his material to problem-solving, Professor Simon says, "Because it is the most important thing man does."

The field of anthropology had a shock two years ago in the work of Alexander Marshack, The Roots of Civilization,[10] which is in itself a fascinating study in problem-solving. Like Heinrich Schliemann, Marshack was not a trained specialist in the field he was to invade. It all started with marks on a prehistoric tool. Marshack knew that the earlier manlike anthropoids were nomadic hunters who took their tools from one camp site to another and who survived by anticipating the location of herds of their prey, and by knowing when the herds would bear their young. The herds, in turn, were following their food, and so it became important to know when certain plants in certain places would be ripe for the herds to use. Seasons of the year were basic knowledge for the solution of the hunter's problem.

Marshack found that the border marks on the tool showed under magnification that they were not made by the same instrument. These could have been made at successive camp sites or on different occasions. With dogged persistence he discovered that these marks corresponded to the phases of the moon. Other tools which he analyzed bore marks accounting for a thirteen-month year. Marshack's discovery pushed back the history of symbol-writing,

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symbol-reading and symbol-teaching tens of thousands of years, as well as the sophistication of language needed to express it. The code on the tool was the key to survival, born of an awareness of time, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, classification, logical reasoning; highly motivated reading matter read with cognitive appraisal of current environmental conditions.

Primitive man who painted the interiors of caves where he took refuge from the killing temperatures of the Ice Age was not just another interior decorator. His drawings of pregnant animals and phallic symbols were not the work of someone who had no television set. Marshack's microscope showed that the marks thought to be phallic symbols were forms of plants and flowers which attracted the animals at a certain time of year. Where and when those plants developed foliage, he would find the animals.

How strange that we should have neglected the cognitive core of reading, that we should have thought grammar was for writing and speaking, not central to the understanding of what was read. How strange that we did not realize the need for a language-related cognitive readiness, that we taught all children alike, whether the language of the book was their mother tongue or an unfamiliar language in an unfamiliar code.

Only this year the United States Supreme Court ruled [11] that a school requiring a child to read English was to be held responsible for providing prior instruction in English. Even primitive man would have understood that. The more civilized we become, the longer it seems to take us to see the obvious. Yet I wonder how many countries have still to make like decisions.

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In the Reading Research Quarterly, Volume VIII Number 2, Dr. Joanna Williams reviews theories and models of learning to read.[12] She makes the statement that present-day theorists seem to be moving toward the view that reading is both a complex cognitive skill, the goal of which is obtaining information, and a complex language system.

In his new book, What Shall We Teach?[13], Professor Merritt points out that competent management is a matter of making intelligent decisions about goals, designing adequate plans, implementing those plans skilfully, and developing from the new base line that has been achieved.

If we take as our new base line the definition of reading which Dr. Williams stated, that reading is both a complex cognitive skill and a complex language system, we then must decide on goals...

What can we expect of the child who comes to reading? He brings a degree of mastery of his mother tongue. The utterances he hears around him which he has learned to associate with certain meanings and feelings and intentions on the part of the speakers come in some kind of rhythm, but the groupings of run-together words give him no warning of a page of symbolic ideas as in Chinese or a page of separated words as in English. As a reader he is going to have to group the ideas or words just as a speaker would. So part of his job is to decide which ideas or words (. .) belong together. One of the ways the teacher would implement this would be to ask questions which the phrases answered. A child

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who doesn't speak the language of the school won't be able to do this.

The child's previous experiences will have provided him with concepts and labels. Initial reading or listening experiences which feature these known ideas will make it easier for him to be a thinker as he reads, an anticipator of what the author is going to say. It is good for children to guess what will happen next and to have many different plausible suggestions with many different defenses of them, so that the child will know many ways to anticipate the next step in a sequence, the effect for a cause, and so forth.[14]

In the development of new concepts the teacher can introduce a ritual of language (How does the duck feel? He's soft. He's smooth. He's fluffy.) -all sentences of sensory attribute; (What can he do? He can run. He can fly. He can walk wobbly.) -all sentences of behavior attributes; (What happens when he swims? He pushes the water and the water makes waves. When you give him some grain? He pecks at the grain. He eats it up.) - cause and effect. Some day, the teacher hopes, sentences like that by their very form will help the child expect and recognize an attribute, a condition of cause and effect, and so forth.

In children's writing, similar impress can be achieved. (My dog likes me because - My Mother likes me because - I scratch his back. I feed him. I help her. I'm good.)

The ultimate goal of our teaching is for the child to become a skilful reader.

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The skilful reader has had many language-related experiences in which he has communicated his ideas and feelings and listened to the language invention of others. His concepts are rounded, so that he has many things to say about a given concept. This being so, he is ready for the directions an author may take in relation to a concept. Suppose he is reading to see whether the author is still on the subject or passing to another subject, (as one must read when the author is enumerating, with one or more sentences devoted to one subject.) When he ceases to encounter words and phrases usually associated with the subject, he thinks that Point No.2 has arrived.

The skilful reader is alert to what I call the mismatching of ideas. The fence runs around the field. Everybody knows that fences stand still. The mismatch or incongruity signals the figurative use of the word runs, and actually now a commonplace use of run./ Or take this sentence: The king stamped his foot and flew to the ceiling."Kings don't fly", thinks the reader."This is fiction. This is fancy." If the reader is not good at making comparisons, he will miss these signals, but the skilful reader doesn't. So he notices the cognitive relationships among ideas such as part-whole, classification, definition, comparison, ordering, enumeration, causation.

The goal of the reader, unless he has a special goal of his own, is to discover the author's focus, whether it be on laws, principles, theories, concepts, problems, events, objects, or living things.

In this search he notes the author's patterns of

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reasoning, such as inductive,deductive,convergent,divergent, syllogistic. He asks questions as he reads, corrects his mistaken hunches and proceeds to generate new ones.

What are the clues to the author's focus? The reader must notice main ideas,examples, elaboration, and application of ideas. But he can't discover these just by being told to find them. What makes a main idea main? What vectors point to it? What examples contribute to it? What elaboration expands it? What applications prove its generality?

These relationships among ideas are revealed through semantic and syntactical relationships among words,phrases, clauses, and sentences - paragraphs, etc.[15]

Additional aids are signs such as capitalization, bold type,italics,punctuation,footnotes,headings and subheadings,indentation,paragraphing,space allotment, and illustrations.

As the good reader observes these elements and their interrelationships, he decides on the author's intent,such as to describe,to persuade,or to evaluate.

He notes the author's nature as revealed by his language,his citing of experiences,his feelings,attitudes, and cognitive skills. The feelings and attitudes of the reader are in turn stimulated by the author, and the reader who wishes to be objective often bends over backwards to resist having his own preconceptions color his acceptance of new information and his inferences based upon it.

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With all of these observations and experiences with the organization and direction of the author's thought as well as the way he has expressed it, the skilful reader operates on the author's message to achieve literal comprehension, to deduce implications and possible applications, to assess the message in relation to previous knowledge, and to store in memory whatever he prefers.

The amazing truth is that all of this is done so rapidly that it cannot be recounted in a valid sequence. The other day I was typing an address. I wrote "Oldman's Traditional School." It should have been "Oldman's Transitional School". My head and hands had completely betrayed what my eyes were registering. My head knew that old men tend to be traditional, and that the next transition for them is something to delay.

The answer to reading comprehension will be not one answer but many answers in congenial relationship. It will require a world of scholarship and dedication and cooperation to achieve. If there is one thing this World Congress will make manifest, it is that reading comprehension is our responsibility, one that cannot be completed solely by the child's recognition of symbols and the teacher's asking questions or the books giving the answers. Whether the teacher is a person or instructional material, the teacher's role is to clarify the process. This is enough challenge to light the years ahead and to make those of us who have been in this work a long time wish we were just beginning.

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